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ABSTRACT

Examination of four programs in which young people have consistently excelled shows common elements, despite differences in setting, population, and goals. The four programs, which exemplify problem solving, peer counseling, community service, and communication respectively, include: (1) the Youth Action Program in New York City, a community improvement program created and run by East Harlem youth with the help of adult facilitators; (2) the Rap Room, located in a Hartsdale, New York, high school, a drop-in peer counseling center staffed by students trained by a school psychologist; (3) the Family Life Theatre in New York City, in which, with the help of adult mentors, high school students develop and present short skits on health-related issues for other young people and community groups; and (4) Youth Communication/Chicago Center in Chicago, Illinois, in which teenagers, with the help of adult facilitators, work to promote positive ideas about the role of adolescents in society. Elements common to all, and which seem to be requisites for excellence, are meaningful and challenging work, a collaborative group that allows for both structure and flexibility and provides responsible roles for youth, facilitating roles for adults that permit careful preparation and training of youth, opportunities for reflection, and rewards for excellence. (CMG)

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TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

DEVELOPING HIGH STANDARDS IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

A Publication of the National Commission
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THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

The National Commission on Resources for Youth was founded in 1967 as an independent, non-profit organization to expand opportunities for young people to assume active, responsible roles in their communities -- what NCRY calls Youth Participation. In programs of Youth Participation, young people gain direct experience in making decisions, working in partnership with their peers and with adults, and meeting genuine community needs. A comprehensive Youth Participation program also provides for youth to reflect critically on their experience, and to study related subject matter. NCRY seeks out, promotes and assists Youth Participation programs that recognize the capabilities and developmental needs of young people.

In 1982, NCRY joined forces with the Institute for Responsive Education. IRE works with parent and citizen organizations to bring about improvements in public schools. It conducts research and does advocacy relating to citizen involvement in education.

This guide was written by Diane Harrington.

Executive Director of NCRY: Peter Kleinbard.

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PREFACE

The idea for a report on excellence resulted from observing two groups of young people. Neither would have thought of themselves as excellent. One group of about 30, mostly between the ages of 15 and 18, consists primarily of high school dropouts; many have been in trouble with the police. These young people, working with adults in a community-based organization in New York City, have mobilized people in their financially impoverished community to attack problems ranging from inadequate and overpriced housing to teenage pregnancy. They have carefully constructed a series of community awareness projects including conferences, publications, and presentations, that have moved others to action; local politicians, normally inattentive, now regularly attend meetings called by these young people.

The second group consisted of about 10 girls, aged 13 to 15. This writer first encountered them while visiting an elementary school in that same New York City community. Thinking that a group of unaccompanied teenage girls in an elementary school might mean trouble, I went to alert the principal. Finding her took time as the school was old, complicated and unfamiliar. When I finally arrived in the auditorium, the principal and about 400 children were watching entranced as a group of ten young dancers in leotards did warm-up exercises before performing. I soon realized that these were the same youngsters I had encountered on the stairs. Several months later, they were to dance at Carnegie Hall as part of the opening event for New York City's Fourth of July Festival. By that time, these junior high schoolers had been incorporated into the Alvin Ailey Company and the entire troupe, under the leadership of Pearl Primus, was lauded in the following day's papers for putting on the best opening performance of the festival.

Despite appearances, past experiences, and the obstacles of a troubled environment, these young people developed and maintained the commitment to do something so well that other people will stop to watch or listen. The combination of spirit, personality

and program that brings this commitment to life remains a fascinating mystery. The purpose of this report is to begin to describe characteristics of successful programs that make them different from many other efforts which result in less outstanding performance.

In preparing this report, NCRY first identified youth programs in which young people have consistently produced outstanding products or offered services that are of high quality. We then brought together people concerned with excellence in youth programs representing the arts, private business and youth service for a day long Idea Exchange. This group identified elements of programs that result in high quality, drawing on their own experiences and those of the programs that NCRY identified. Diane Harrington, who has extensive experience in developing programs, synthesized these discussions and prepared this paper.

This effort to identify program components that result in high standards by youth is necessarily a preliminary one. To do the job properly would require resources far more extensive than we had at our command. Faced with the constant evidence of young people's capacity to do extraordinary work, it seems important to begin to point out how to get the best of this potential, for in too many cases it is missed.

We wish to thank the following people who helped to prepare this paper by participating in a day-long Idea Exchange:

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SECTION I: EXCELLENCE IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

How do we help young people to set high standards for what they do, and to master the skills to achieve them? Parents know that merely *demanding* excellence of their children is not enough; teachers have found that giving low grades for work that is not up to their standards does not, by itself, spur students to do better. High expectations must be internalized to be truly achieved. And this process -- learning to set high standards for oneself -- can seem impossible in an environment of planned obsolescence, where new cars break down on the highway, toys fall apart on Christmas Day, and buttons pop off the shirts we have just purchased. Parents, educators and young people often feel frustrated and alone as they struggle to set, achieve and maintain high standards.

Three premises underlie this paper. The first is that excellence *can* be achieved by young people. It *is* being attained, sometimes in unlikely places and by unexpected youth. The second premise is that excellence need not be limited to a few programs or a few performers; it can be achieved by *many* young people, given the right circumstances. This paper will attempt to describe those circumstances, but let the reader beware! The third premise is that there is no "recipe" for excellence. We cannot say, "Do A, B and C, and you will get excellence."

What we have set out to do, rather, is to identify common practices from programs in which young people consistently achieve excellence. However, the exact mix of people, practices and values that works in one program is unique. Each program must fashion its own pattern. This paper describes the elements to which project directors and participants must attend if the project is to set high standards. The relative emphasis and timing will depend upon the particular effort.

FOUR EXCELLENT YOUTH PROGRAMS

Since 1967, the National Commission on Resources for Youth has examined thousands of youth programs around the country, programs based in schools,

hospitals, libraries, community organizations, and other settings. From these, NCRY has collected and disseminated information about innovative programs where youth take responsible and challenging roles. The four programs described here stand out because of two factors: 1) the excellence of the products or services provided by the program's young people; and 2) the commitment to excellence by these youth. NCRY has visited each of these programs on at least three occasions and has reviewed the products of their work.

Each of these programs is also an example of the kind of work in which young people have proven effective time and again: Problem Solving, Peer Counseling, Community Service, and Communication. For each program described, NCRY has identified others in which youth have provided similar services or products, often just as good.

PROBLEM SOLVING: YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM - New York, New York.

In East Harlem, an economically poor and isolated section of New York City, a group of teenagers (male *and* female) are renovating a four-story building, which they plan to use for a variety of community services. These young people are being trained in all phases of building construction and rehabilitation. But, more importantly, they have been involved in planning and organizing the project from the start: setting goals, choosing a site, raising money, evaluating their progress, solving problems as they arise, and more. Most exciting to see is the commitment of the group to doing a good job, their pride in improving the community.

The *Youth Action Restoration Crew*, just described, is only one of seven projects that are part of this community improvement program created and run by East Harlem youth with the help of several adult facilitators. The others include: *Johnson Youth Patrol*, a group of teenagers who patrol a local housing project to help cut crime; *We are Somebody Community Center*, a cultural center with a leadership school; *Hotline Cares*, a telephone counseling and referral service; *Young People's Block Association*, which is converting a vacant lot into a playground and park; *Homes-Away-From-Home*, which places youth from troubled families in "second families" or in collective living centers; and *Youth Forum*, which promotes informed political action through speakouts, newsletters and meetings.

Each of the YAP projects carefully incorporates

input from members of the community and utilizes a painstaking process of consensus-building among its youth participants. Here, the concept of "excellence" includes the fullness of democratic participation as well as the quality of the services and products that result.

PEER COUNSELING: RAP ROOM - Woodland Hills High School, Hartsdale, New York.

One teenager confronts a friend for snubbing her; another tries to understand the death of a classmate; a young man talks about his academic problems; a parent asks for advice on dealing with her daughter, who is starting to use drugs; a young woman speaks about her parents' recent divorce.

These discussions all take place in the Rap Room, a drop-in group counseling center in a suburban Westchester high school. Counseling in the Rap Room is facilitated by trained students and a school psychologist. Its operating rules are based on consensus and precedent, and are enforced by students. These rules, which emphasize trust, concern and openness, are rarely violated. Both confrontation and self-disclosure happen here, within carefully supervised limits, as these young people discuss specific problems that concern them both individually and collectively. Through this process, the young people involved learn the skills for personal growth as well as for helping someone else.

What distinguishes the Rap Room from many other peer counseling projects is the constant stress on "Responsible Concern." This core value serves as a standard against which each person's behavior is measured. It enables a student to call a friend to task because s/he may be acting in a way that is self-destructive, even though that behavior -- say, using drugs -- is well within the accepted standards of the peer group. The insistence on behavior explicitly demonstrating Responsible Concern establishes a high standard for group interaction at the Rap Room.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: FAMILY LIFE THEATRE - New York, New York.

Several high school students act out a scene that they have developed for an audience of other teenagers. In the skit, an alcoholic father who abuses his wife and has just lost his job is confronted by his son. The son is torn between feelings of love, anger, and fear. The mother defends her husband when she sees him under attack. Afterward, the actors stay "in character" to answer questions from the audience. These questions explore contradictory

feelings and issues raised by the skit, such as the mother's defense of her husband despite his drunkenness and abuse of her.

The actors in this drama are part of Family Life Theatre, a program based at Metropolitan Hospital and administered by the Family Life Division of New York Medical College. In this program, 20 - 40 high school students, working in groups of ten, research health, family and social issues that concern young people -- issues like sexuality, substance abuse, crime, racism, school and employment. After training in theater techniques, they combine their findings with personal experience to create characters, situations and dialogue in short skits. Each performance is improvisational, within the limits of a set situation designed to give information and raise questions about health-related issues for other young people and community groups.

The actors, with the help of their adult mentors, hold themselves to rigorous standards of quality both with respect to the quality of their performance and the validity of the issues they are presenting. Scenes are repeated and adapted again and again in rehearsal with both young people and adults critiquing them.

COMMUNICATION: YOUTH COMMUNICATION/CHICAGO CENTER - Chicago, Illinois.

If you were 17 again.....would you do high school differently? What kind of education after high school would you choose?

A group of Chicago teenagers asked these questions and more to an advertising agency art director, a fashion designer, an emergency room nurse, a truck driver, an alcoholism counselor, a bank personnel manager and an auto mechanic. Their interviews formed the basis of short vignettes of each person's view of his or her career.

These teenage reporters are part of the staff of *New Expression*, a monthly newsmagazine published by and for young people. The planning, writing, editing, photography and lay-out of *New Expression* are the responsibility of its young staff with two adult facilitators. Each issue of the magazine is distributed free of charge to local schools, community centers, stores, churches and other places frequented by young people.

New Expression is only one of the activities of the Youth Communication/Chicago Center. It also includes a *Media Access Group*, in which students

work to make Chicago newspapers, television programs and radio stations more accessible to teens and to promote positive ideas about the role of adolescents in society. Another component of the center is the *Forum Program*. Here young people plan and carry out citywide forums where Chicago youth meet with representatives of local businesses, government agencies and other organizations that affect their lives.

Participants at Youth Communication learn quickly that their work will be evaluated by their readers. Articles that contain errors or that are not carefully researched are hard to defend from angry letters. Thus, the youth editors establish careful procedures for checking each article and create a climate of high expectations.

KEY ELEMENTS

What besides age does a young man renovating a building in East Harlem have in common with a young woman in a Westchester high school discussing the death of a friend? What is similar about the Westchester youth and a young reporter in Chicago? Like the teenage New York City actor who can stay "in character" to answer unpredictable, probing questions from her peers, all of these young people have a commitment to excellence that is obvious in the quality of the work they do.

Despite their differences in setting, population and goals, the Youth Participation* programs in which these young people are involved have underlying common elements. These elements create the circumstances that encourage young people to be committed to and to achieve excellence. They are:

1. *Meaningful, challenging work* that is worth doing, because of its benefits to others, but isn't easy.
2. *A collaborative group* that includes:
   - *Structure and flexibility* -- room for young people to expand their capabilities without being overwhelmed.
   - *Responsible roles for youth.* Each young person can make a difference in the

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*NCRY's model for Youth Participation includes four major components: action in the community that meets a real need, opportunities to work in a collaborative relationship with peers and adults, a share in planning and in making decisions, and reflection. See *Youth Participation, A Concept Paper*, NCRY, 1974.

overall quality of the group's work.

3. *Facilitating roles for adults* in guiding but not controlling the young people involved.
   - *Careful preparation and training* enabling young people to master needed skills.
   - *Opportunities for reflection* -- learning from experience.
4. *Rewards for excellence* to consumers and participants.

SECTION II: KEY ELEMENTS OF YOUTH PROGRAMS

CHALLENGING, MEANINGFUL WORK

It's not strange that they care so much. If you give kids something worth prizing, you'll be amazed at how much they value it. They, like all other human beings, need to feel they're worth something. If you put consequential work before them in a respectful way, they'll jump at the chance.

Ann Christine Heintz
Founder, Youth Communication/Chicago Center

Most of us are motivated by a combination of internal and external factors; although we work hard to meet standards we have set for ourselves, we need the praise and approval of others and the knowledge that our work will make a difference to someone. Adolescents, who are in the process of defining and testing their own skills and values, seek reassurance from external reactions. They can be sensitive to criticism; most need acceptance from peers and adults. It is helpful to tell them when something is well done.

The nature of the work we ask teenagers to do in youth programs is also critical. When we ask them to undertake tasks of little or no importance, where neither mistakes nor successes have any noticeable impact, they may feel that we are telling them that *they* are unimportant.

In all youth programs where young people produce excellent products or services, on the other hand, we find that they are involved in meaningful, challenging work. The job they are asked to do is worth doing, it makes a difference to other people, and it isn't easy. In asking them to undertake it, we are telling them we believe in their capacity. What they are involved in matters to other people, including adults, and it also matters to them.

This is particularly striking in the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM. Here young people participate in a range of problem-solving activities aimed at improving

the quality of life in their community. There is a direct relationship between needs expressed by the community and the young people's projects. The *Johnson Youth Patrol*, for example, which patrols local housing projects to help cut crime, has a close relationship with the housing projects' tenant association. In response to tenants' expressed needs, the Patrol set up an escort service for the elderly.

The *Young People's Block Association*, another branch of the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM, is converting a vacant lot into a playground and park. In order to determine the needs of the neighborhood, the group surveyed residents before beginning its project. They know, too, that the completed project must "measure up" if it is truly to fill the community's need.

Another program tackling problems and issues considered vital by its young participants is the YOUTH COMMUNICATION/CHICAGO CENTER. Here students from high schools all over Chicago are working with adult media specialists to promote youth ideas and concerns and to encourage established media to portray teenagers as responsible members of society. To these ends they publish a monthly newsmagazine, initiate and maintain contacts with representatives of local newspapers, radio stations and television programs, and arrange meetings between Chicago's adult leaders and youth.

The young people who are part of YOUTH COMMUNICATION/CHICAGO CENTER see themselves as a lobby for youth -- speaking out when others can't or won't. Recently, incomplete and misleading statistics of a study on juvenile crime were exaggerated by Chicago's media, leading local parents, teachers and employers to express fear and hostility toward area youth. Young people from the Center went into action. They researched the facts, then called a press conference to explain their position.

In both of the youth programs just described, young people's commitment to excellence grew out of their commitment to the job they do. Because the job matters, to themselves and to others, it is important to do the job well. And they recognize that if others are to take their work seriously, they must themselves become skilled and informed.

A COLLABORATIVE GROUP

Finding a job worth doing and committing oneself to doing it well are only first steps in the pursuit of excellence by young people. The nature of the group in which they work is also critical: how it is structured, what roles they are allowed or encouraged to play, what role the adult leader takes, what kind of preparation and training they receive, and whether they are asked to reflect on what they have done. These factors can determine whether the young people maintain the commitment and standards they have set, whether they master needed skills, and, finally, whether they are able to achieve what they have set out to do.

Among young people, the peer group often has exaggerated importance in establishing standards for behavior. For example, some sociological studies indicate that youth peer groups expect their members to do poorly in academic work and suggest this is a factor in their poor performance in school. Youth projects that achieve high quality usually incorporate regular group activity such as an evaluation or problem-solving sessions, in which the group assesses its work. Adult leaders have a critical role in helping the group to stretch for higher standards, sometimes by raising questions about the quality of the work and sometimes by demonstrating or presenting models of excellence, including their own work or behavior.

An effective group clearly and often articulates standards and values for its work. These must be shared among the members. These values cannot be imposed from without. They must seem to be demanded by the difficulty and importance of the task and by the ethos of the group. Group members must feel they share responsibility for achieving their objectives and that they have an interest in supporting the efforts of each member.

The group is important, also, in *transmitting* values. Serial leadership, a strategy by which next year's leaders participate in the current year's work, is an effective means of maintaining a youth's commitment to certain standards. The new leaders will have learned the group's values, and retain them even though the current leaders may graduate or leave. When passed on in this way, a group's standards can be extremely hardy and persistent over years.

Structure and Flexibility

A group in which young people can work effectively must achieve a very delicate balance between structure and flexibility. By "structure," we mean rules, procedures and activities which predetermine how they use their time. There is no way to define this point of balance exactly. But it must avoid too much structure, that allows young people no chance to be creative or to learn from their mistakes, and too little structure, which sets them adrift.

It is probably useful to think of this balance as "flexibility within structure." The key to maintaining the balance is a task -- or goal. When the focus is to accomplish a task rather than to follow a set of procedures, structure can be creative.

In the FAMILY LIFE THEATRE, overall structure is provided by the task of developing and presenting a skit on health-related issues. Young people define the issues, research them, and prepare characters and dialogue to present them, under the supervision of health professionals who make sure that accurate information is portrayed. Each performance is an improvisation by the young actors. They are so familiar with their roles that not only can they improvise within the framework of a skit they have already constructed, but they can also remain "in character" afterward to answer questions from the audience. The extraordinary skill with which these young people meet their responsibilities is at least partially due to the fact that they set the task and define the important issues themselves. No adult tells them, "Do a skit about alcoholism." They are responsible for making this kind of decision themselves, and then, with guidance, planning how to carry it out.

In the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM, young people have established task forces to try to solve community problems. The task forces meet regularly and have a simple format for their meetings. This provides a structure within which they can attack a problem. By themselves, or through polling the community, the young people determine what problems require action. For example, they determined that there was a need to strengthen youth leadership in East Harlem. With that objective, the group decided to conduct a leadership conference which the task force planned over a period of six months. The conference was so successful that they now have one each year, though each one is slightly different in format and theme to build upon the previous year's experience.

Responsible Roles for Youth

One of the most critical factors in the nature of the group is the role young people are allowed or encouraged to play. In every one of the programs we have described, youth are involved in setting goals and expectations, and are expected to take real responsibility for their mistakes and successes. In this kind of environment, each young person knows that his or her contribution makes a difference in the overall quality of the group's work and that his or her peers as well notice the contribution. The young person knows s/he is accountable.

In the RAP ROOM, for example, young people actually counsel their peers. They use acceptable counseling techniques like active listening, concerned questioning and open feedback. The most consciously used technique is modeling; the qualities these young people model most carefully are openness, concern, tenacity and follow-up. With supervision by a school psychologist, these high school students demonstrate a remarkable combination of tenderness and toughness toward their peers. They learn to resolve serious problems and to help others in an atmosphere where taking responsibility for one's words and actions is paramount.

A broad range of responsible roles is also played by young people in the YOUTH COMMUNICATION/CHICAGO CENTER. In carrying out the Center's activities, youth work as reporters, editors, public relations personnel, business managers, researchers and policy makers. They write free-lance articles, appear on talk shows and call press conferences to publicize issues that concern them. Teenagers also appoint and make up the Steering Committee of the Center, elect students to responsible positions on the newsmagazine, and make up 40% of the Executive Board legally responsible for the program.

There is, of course, an obvious risk in giving young people responsibilities like these: they might fail. In fact, sometimes they do. The *Youth Action Restoration Crew* of the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM had to give up plans for the first building rehabilitation site they chose. The group did not consider its planning time wasted, however, for not only had they learned from their mistakes, but they had also demonstrated their motivation and cohesiveness.

The opportunity to fail is also the opportunity to succeed, and, more often than not, as young people learn to take responsibility, they surprise both

themselves and others by their accomplishments. A commitment to excellence grows not only when the job matters, but also when one's own contribution makes a difference.

FACILITATING ROLES FOR ADULTS

Coach, cheerleader, guide, mentor, listener, counselor, teacher -- all these and more may be required of the adult facilitator in a Youth Participation project. This is not an easy role to take. Working with unpredictable, changeable and sometimes negative adolescents can be very frustrating; but the rewards of watching teenagers begin to take responsibility and make a real and lasting contribution are unmatched.

The adult leader must, first, believe and communicate his or her belief that young people are capable of excellence. Many will be skeptical -- colleagues, other adults, sometimes even the young people themselves. But: "Young people can do more than most adults think!" reiterated experienced facilitators at NCRY's Idea Exchange on Excellence (June, 1982).

The adult facilitator must also be sensitive to the needs of adolescents. At a difficult time in their development, teenagers must be treated with compassion, yet much should be expected of them. They need to try on a lot of different roles, and they need the security of a supportive group and group leader should they fail. They need to be taken seriously and treated with respect. Yet, their emotional immaturity and insecurity will sometimes cause them to say and do things that are disturbing. The adult leader must be able to understand the immediacy and importance of these mood swings, and to maintain objectivity.

Adult leaders must bear in mind that young people are learning from them at all times, whether or not what they intend to be "teaching" or "leading." The adult role as model is enormously important. Thus, the adult's own commitment, willingness to take pains to achieve high quality, and attentiveness will help to establish the quality of the project, whether or not the adult intends this to occur.

The ultimate goal of the adult leader in Youth Participation will be to give power and influence away by providing young people with skills, experience and assurance, and power. But his or her centrality is a fact that should not be underestimated. Teenagers will insist on this until they

succeed in establishing activities that are less dependent on the adult. It is useful for adult leaders to have some means of objective feedback on their performance and impact. This can come from the youth participants. A trusted outsider who can observe from time to time and give feedback in a secure environment, can be an enormous asset.

There are two mistakes that adult facilitators commonly make. One is to think that Youth Participation means letting youth "do their own thing" without any guidance. Teenagers could not have accomplished the impressive range of problem-solving activities in the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM, for example, without skilled and experienced adult leaders. These adults were able to translate the dreams of East Harlem youth into "do-able" goals and projects. They were also able to help locate resources and provide needed training.

The second mistake of many adult facilitators is to be too much in charge, so that the youth involved have no responsibility and feel none. It is sometimes hard for teachers in peer tutoring projects for example, not to tell young tutors how to do their job. These young people are eager to plan and design their own lessons, knowing that they can turn to teachers when help is needed. Without this freedom and responsibility, along with the fumbling and anxiety that often go with it, there would be no commitment.

Adult leaders must learn to guide young people: to give them real choices and responsibilities within realistic limits. In this way the young people involved learn to take on new responsibilities and are able to make real and successful contributions.

CAREFUL PREPARATION AND TRAINING

Young people can be creative and responsible only when they have mastered the necessary skills and understand clearly what they are responsible for. Often they need help in defining their tasks and in gaining the confidence to test new skills. They need to practice what they learn and to take on new responsibilities a step at a time. This is why careful preparation and training are essential to their success.

Sometimes training can be provided by experienced youth. In the RAP ROOM, for example, selected alumni help to train new student counselors in an intensive

80-hour summer workshop. This workshop emphasizes the skills student counselors will need as well as their own personal growth. Alumni model the behaviors student counselors are expected to learn.

Standards of excellence are far more likely to be attained if training is an ongoing process in youth programs, not a one-shot workshop or seminar. In the FAMILY LIFE THEATRE, for example, training includes two parallel strands. The first strand is an intensive ten-week, twelve-hours a week, training program in the techniques of improvisational theater. The second strand is a series of health education seminars. The second strand reinforces the first; the health education seminars provide the actors with factual information on the issues they will be addressing. This helps them to correct their own misconceptions and also ensures that their skits and answers to audience questions will be accurate.

An important element in the training given in RAP ROOM and FAMILY LIFE THEATRE is the development of a trusting and cohesive group. A sense of openness, the ability to share feelings, the knowledge that others will be supportive -- all of these help the young people involved to be committed to each other and to take risks as they try out new skills and responsibilities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION

Youth learn most from their experiences when they have the opportunity to reflect on what has happened to them and what this means in their present and future lives, and to begin to act on the insights gained. Learning from experience is not an automatic occurrence, and reflection is seldom popular with energetic adolescents. But every program in which young people achieve excellence includes activities that encourage the participants to reflect consciously on their experiences.

Reflection includes observing, asking questions, comparing and contrasting experiences, forming generalizations and trying to apply these to new experiences. These skills can be practiced and refined in a variety of ways: individually, through journal writing, observation and written evaluations; with another person, through conferences with the adult leader or supervisor; or in a group, through listening, planning, role playing and brainstorming. The key to effective reflection is that it must be established as a *regular routine* -- a kind of

"de-briefing" after each day's or week's experiences.

Reflective activities fit into each program differently, depending upon the program's objectives, its schedule and time constraints and the kinds of problems experienced by its participants. In the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM, for example, the Youth Action Restoration Crew meets weekly to review its work and to plan for the future. In the RAP ROOM, on the other hand, reflection takes place more informally as a follow-up on each student's expressed concerns. Reflection for the FAMILY LIFE THEATRE takes place as an evaluation and problem-solving discussion after each performance.

Whatever the activities or schedule of reflection, two elements are crucial. Reflective activities must be concrete, related to the real experiences of the participants, and as much care must be given to the quality and significance of reflection as is given to other program activities. In this way, young people who are committed to doing a good job will begin to evaluate themselves honestly and to discover ways to improve their work. Not only will their basic skills and problem-solving abilities increase, but they will also learn to assess clearly their personal and group impact.

REWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

When I found out I had gotten into the group, I was afraid....We learned to trust each other. Now we believe in each other. We know how hard we have to work. The more we work, the more we learn how hard we can push ourselves, and we always try to push a little harder, striving to make a better show, learning about each other, our characters, ourselves. Family Life Theatre has made my life fuller and happier.

Diana Griffin
Family Life Theatre participant

Young people must be rewarded for doing *well*, not for just *doing*. In programs where young people consistently achieve excellence, there are intrinsic rewards for success as opposed to mediocrity. These rewards take many forms, from the intangible sense of satisfaction at helping someone else in the RAP ROOM to the tangible achievement of a renovated building in the YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM. Whatever the form, rewards for excellence are necessary to sustaining motivation and commitment and to evaluating the group's products or services.

Rewards come, first, from the consumers of the group's products or services. Audience reactions to performances of FAMILY LIFE THEATRE tell the actors whether their performance was effective. Reader responses to issues of *New Expression* give reporters and editors at YOUTH COMMUNICATION/ CHICAGO CENTER feedback on the quality of their paper.

Ultimately, young people must learn to reward themselves for a job well done. Excellence is truly achieved when youth set their own standards, and measure their performance against these standards. At times, their disciplined assessment may not agree with that of their audience. If performance is found wanting, then one must do better, despite the accolades of others. In the programs described here, the young people involved are always working to improve what already looks like an excellent program.

SECTION III: CONCLUSIONS

When young people achieve excellence, we all benefit. Not only do we enjoy the services they provide, but we also profit in the future, when they become citizens whose values and skills help to shape the world in which all of us will live.

In the best of all possible worlds, we adults, individually and collectively through our social institutions, would invite our youth to join us in adult roles. We would have or take time to work with youth; we would allow them to practice making decisions, important ones; we would help them take responsiblity for their decisions and actions, even when they made mistakes; we would reflect with them on what they had done and what it meant in their present and future lives; we would allow them to discover and test new values and skills; we would challenge and excite them with ever more demanding tasks and activities, encouraging them to set their own goals; through all of this, we would expect the same excellence that we expected and demonstrated in our own work.

Fortunately, this world exists. It is the world of the four youth programs described in this paper, and of other programs where youth and adults join together to reach for excellence.